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ABSTRACT

As an alternative to the traditional practice of the instructor serving as judge to individual two-to-four-person debates in front of the class, a communication instructor holds in-class debate tournaments in which all students are involved in one-on-one debates at the same time. Such a format avoids difficulties involved in two-person teams, can be used with a class consisting of even or odd numbers of students, and lasts 30-45 minutes rather than nearly 2 hours. Students serve as both debaters and judges, and are required to turn in completed ballots clearly indicating a reason for their decision. Debates follow NFA-LD (National Forensic Association) format in which either value or policy resolutions may be debated. Students are actively involved with debates and are provide with more than one opportunity to debate. However, the instructor may be stretched thin to answer questions, particularly in the first few rounds, and extra classrooms must be available to hold the rounds of debate. (RS)

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STREAMLINING THE IN-CLASS DEBATE TOURNAMENT

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The idea of holding debates in class is not new. A traditional practice is, however, for the instructor to serve as the "judge" and render a decision/grade for the debate. The majority of students watch as two-to-four persons debate in front of the class. Students normally get pretty bored after watching their classmates in four or five debates. The amount of student involvement in the debate process significantly drops off. An alternative format is to hold an in-class tournament with all students involved in debates *at the same time*.

I set the class up so the first three-fourths of meetings are devoted to both theoretical and practical discussions concerning argumentation and debate. We discuss and prepare to participate in a round-robin in-class tournament based on the NFA-LD format. The NFA-LD format is one-on-one debate rather than team-debate (i.e., two-on-two), and either value or policy resolutions may be debated.

I use one-on-one debating for a number of reasons: (1) Avoids the difficulties which occur when pairing students into two-person teams. Difficulties include the headache of a student who drops the class and leaves a partner stranded, in-fighting between partners; and "I got a 'C' because of the partner you gave me" (2) team-debate requires an even number of students in the class, while LD works with any number of students; (3) a debate round lasts 30-45 minutes rather than 1-1/2 to 2 hours.

I normally use the NFA-LD resolution for the year in case any students may wish to make the crossover from the classroom to competitive forensics. An instructor may, of course, construct their own resolution for an in-class tournament. Students research the resolution and prepare both affirmative and negative positions.

I involve all students throughout the entire activity by involving students as both debaters *and* judges. The dual role of debater and judge is possible by utilizing a three-point rotation system. For example, Bobby will argue the affirmative in Rd. 1, argue the negative in Rd. 2, and serve as a judge in Rd. 3. The rotation starts over with Rd. 4. A hypothetical four-round tournament with nine students (oh, to be so lucky!) is scheduled below:

Round 1:		Room 1	Room 2	Room 3
	Aff	Ed	Sue	Vicki
	Neg	Kacey	Phil	Sam
	Judge	Ron	Kirstin	Rex
Round 2:		Room 1	Room 2	Room 3
	Aff	Rex	Ron	Kirstin
	Neg	Ed	Sue	Vicki
	Judge	Kacey	Phil	Sam
Round 3:		Room 1	Room 2	Room 3
	Aff	Sam	Kacey	Phil
	Neg	Rex	Ron	Kirstin
	Judge	Ed	Sue	Vicki
Round 4:		Room 1	Room 2	Room 3
	Aff	Vicki	Sue	Ed
	Neg	Ron	Kirstin	Rex
	Judge	Sam	Kacey	Phil

Student-judges are required to turn in completed ballots clearly indicating a Reason-for-Decision (RFD). I set the standard that all judges' decisions are FINAL, pre-empting debater's wanting to argue each decision with the instructor.

Students may earn points toward a grade as both debaters and judges. Points as debaters may be based win/loss record. I set up the point system so a .500 record and lower earns at least a mid-C. The guarantee of a mid-C as long as a student is trying helps to allay fears of the debate process. Points as judges may be based on the completeness and coherence of the RFD on ballots.

Depending on class size, I have approximately 8-10 rooms of competition occurring during each round. The instructor, in the role of "guidance counselor," floats between the various 8-10 debates answering questions and providing direction to dilemmas students may encounter.

The tournament format has the following advantages and limitations:

Advantages:

1. Students are actively involved with debates during each class period;
2. The necessity to render a judge's decision places a burden of responsibility on students which tends to heighten their involvement in class material;
3. Students are provided with more than one opportunity to debate. An issue which did not go well in one round may be focused for improvement in later rounds.

Limitations:

1. The instructor may be stretched thin to answer questions--particularly the first couple of rounds;

2. Extra classrooms must be available to hold the rounds of debate. I like to keep one debate per classroom due to noise considerations;
3. The tournament format uses a large amount of paper, particularly, the number of ballots which must be prepared.